pasteurized. What an asset.

Deane said he was just burnt-out.

Johnny said maybe he needed a vacation.

Deane said he thought he'd go away.

Johnny said that was a bad idea. It was hard to get a job these days.

Deane stared at him for a moment. It was as if someone had broken the big bay window and the night came in with the cold to emphasize: that wasn't what he meant.

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Getting off was escapism. Who knew what into? It might take billions of years for the polar express to arrive at that station somewhere north of Archangel. North of Finland. But it would. Global warming would only be a memory growing cold.

Getting off was the surest way to arrive ahead of schedule. The station master would be a skeleton made of ashes and glue. He'd speak Russian.

Deane always wanted to learn another language. He'll offer Deane one of his daughters, and a Lucky Strike.

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Deane's death was something that happened in the movies happening to Johnny. It took Death fifty years to catch up. A few more years and Johnny might have escaped by dying himself. He tripped and stumbled over his mother's body. He got up again right away; otherwise, Death would have caught him then for sure. Instead it barely affected his stride.

Death is everywhere. Death comes out of the house, stands leering beside Johnny and Gabriel, and leans on the railing. Death has Deane's gauntness without his pain. Deane's gauntness was Death's to begin with. The ashes in the can have more substance than Deane has now.

Death is no usurper. Death is a restored monarch re-establishing his reign. Deane was his protector but he wasn't his successor. Death settled that affair of state.

Death is next in line at the No Frills. Death waits behind the cash with his bony hand on the till where anyone can see it if he will. He can't steal what's his by reversion. He wouldn't bother.

Death is not very frilly but very obsequious. The cashier weeps to see Johnny bearing the purple bin. Death is in the no-name chicken strips and the white breast-meat nuggets. On every pack of Lucky Strikes a pale Death's Head preempts the Surgeon General's warning.

Johnny's clothes are stained with bleach and covered with ashes where Deane's bony fingers have touched them. Holes appear in the shirt Deane gave him and melt where he gazed with eyes of flame. Look pretty for the picture, Connie.

Death stars in Pink Flamingos and sits stoned in the audience with Deane and his lesbian girl friends from his job at the women's shelter. Death laughs at everything. There are no serious parts.

Death walks on the green grass in daylight and sleeps in the ground. Death holds everything together. Death is bad continuity. Death is the pink flamingos and the newspaper blowing against their iron stilts during the credits.